Japanese Americans

Where Have They Been? Where Are They Going?

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Where They Have Been

IT HAS NOW BEEN over a century since Japanese immigrants—strangers from a different shore[1]—began arriving in significant numbers on America's shores. They were just one of many groups involved in the multicultural growth of America. However, they were racially different from those arriving on the other side of the continent. Yet, like the latter they came seeking a better life for themselves. Their arrival from Asia was a continuation of an immigrant stream first begun by the Chinese several decades earlier. It is a wonder that the Japanese came at all considering what happened to the Chinese before them: discrimination, extreme hostility, violence, even massacres (Hosokawa, 1969:41–4). These hostilities finally resulted in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, an act that closed any further Chinese immigration to America. This act was a turning point in American immigrant history (Takaki, 1989:110–11). Until then, immigrants, at least the white immigrants from northern and western Europe, were welcomed. But as the composition of the immigrant stream changed—to those coming from southern and eastern Europe—and further changed with the arrival of the Chinese, resistance to immigration began to mount. With the closure of Chinese immigration there was still a demand for cheap labor and the Japanese seemed to be the appropriate replacements.

The earliest Japanese immigrants were mostly students encouraged and subsidized by the Japanese government to learn Western ways. There were also organized efforts to form Japanese colonies in the United States but

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most of these attempts ended in failure (Hosokawa, 1969:31–9). After this came a new wave of unskilled laborers seeking a better life. The main part of this stream did not arrive until after 1890.

The first movement of laborers out of Japan was of those contracted to work in the sugar plantations of Hawaii (Ichihashi, 1932:16–30). These laborers did quite well for themselves when compared to workers in Japan, but the contracting of these laborers for Hawaii was abandoned and emigration turned toward the United States mainland. While some of those who emigrated to Hawaii were to become part of the new stream of laborers to the mainland, the main segment of immigrants to the United States came directly from Japan.

The immigrants did not come from all over Japan. Most of them originated from certain prefectures in western Japan. The largest numbers came from the rural districts of Hiroshima Prefecture. Other large numbers came from Yamaguchi and Kumamoto prefectures. Table 1 presents data on the total amount of emigration from the various prefectures. Why did these particular areas become the great senders? It is true that economic conditions in these prefectures, particularly in agriculture, were extremely harsh at the time, and there was a national conscription system that many young Japanese men wanted to avoid. But these same conditions existed throughout Japan.

TABLE 1

Emigration from Japanese Prefectures 1889–1903 *

Prefectures	**Numbers**
Hiroshima	21,861
Kumamoto	12,649
Yamaguchi	11,219
Fukuoka	7,698
Wakayama	3,752
Nagasaki	3,548
Okayama	2,176
Oita	579
Saga	574
Kagoshima	194
Others	20,312

* Ichihashi, 1932:80.

Perhaps the major reason for the preponderance of immigrants from these areas lies in the way the laborers were recruited and how informal

networks become the channels for immigrant opportunities. Early immigration began when laborers were recruited for overseas work by either government agents or private companies hired by overseas agencies. The particular individuals involved in the recruitment process focussed their efforts on areas of western Japan (Ichioka, 1988:47–52). When the original recruitment of workers for Hawaii began, it caught the attention of many others in the region. Immigrants to Hawaii were earning four to six times more than the skilled laborers in the villages of western Japan (Ichioka, 1988:46). Word of great overseas opportunities spread throughout the region. Informal networks (e.g., relatives, neighbors, villagers) became the major channel for encouraging and focussing emigration from these areas. Two regions of Japan, known as the *San'yōdō* and the *Saikaidō* (which includes Hiroshima and Yamaguchi prefectures), sent over 70% of the overseas emigrants(Ichihashi, 1932:81).

The immigrants were from poor but respectable farm backgrounds. They were known for their strong work ethic and entrepreneurial values. They were not illiterate, most of them had at least an elementary school level of education (Ichihashi, 1932:76), a level higher than most immigrants of this period.

In the beginning these immigrants were sojourners, hoping to make their fortunes in their new land and return to Japan. They were referred to as *dekaseginin,* meaning people who leave their home temporarily to work elsewhere (Ichioka, 1988:3). Such views were common among immigrant groups. But, as one might expect, these views become abandoned over time. For the get-rich-and-return scenario never materializes; the elusive riches are never attained, and families, homes, and community come along to change one's commitments. So, over a period of time, the sojourners evolved into a community of permanent settlers trying to find their place in a new, and what was to become a hostile, society (Gill et al., 1992:333–5).

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF IMMIGRATION

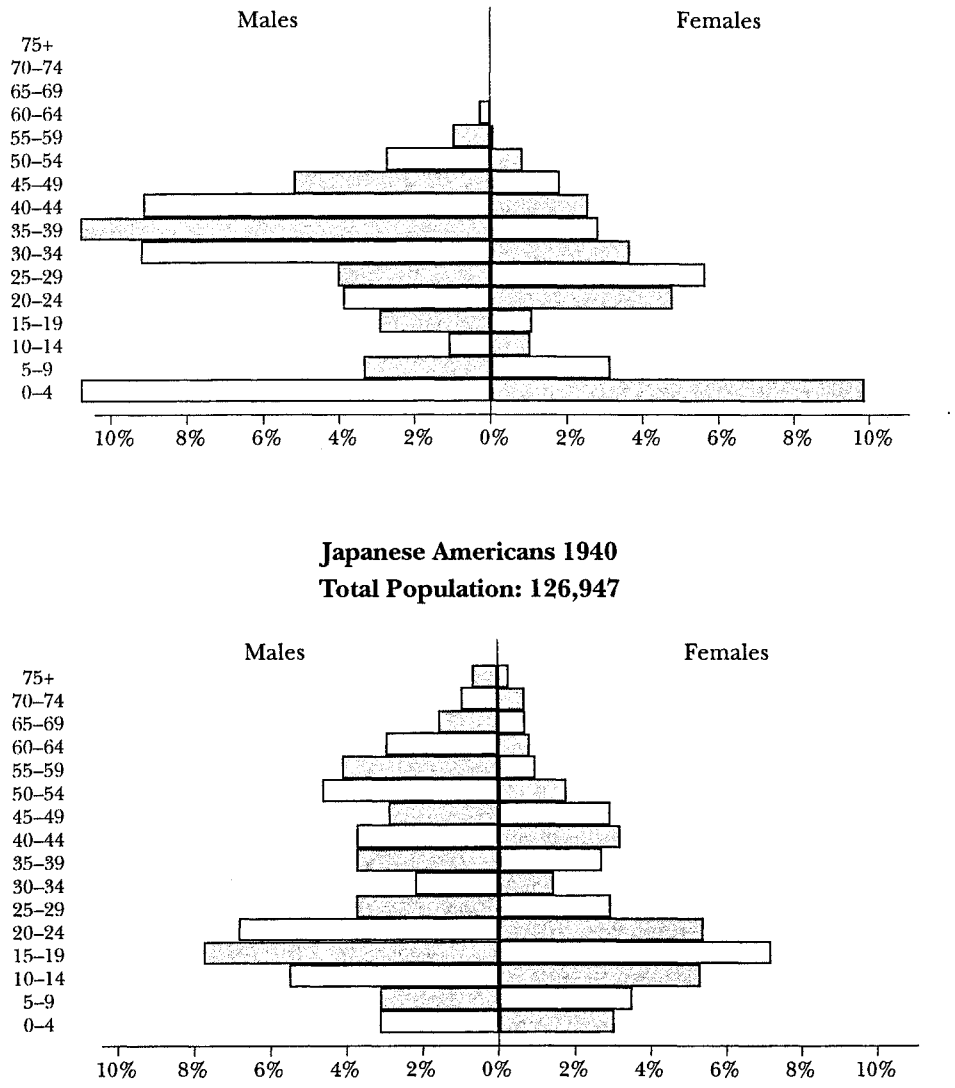
Overseas immigration has always been selective in terms of age, sex, and marital status. Most of the original Japanese immigrants were relatively young, single, adult males. The bulk of the male immigration occurred in the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century. Until 1900 there were fewer than 25,000 Japanese immigrants. However, from 1900 to 1908 the numbers increased substantially, so that over 20,000 immigrants came in 1903 alone (Ichihashi, 1932:55–7). As happened in the case of their Chinese predecessors, resistance to their

coming increased. Finally, the United States and Japan arrived at a "Gentlemen's Agreement" in 1908. In effect, the Japanese government agreed not to send any more laborers. Only those who were joining family members and those planning to marry someone who was already in the United States were allowed entrance after 1908 (Ichihashi, 1932:243–60). This agreement sharply changed the composition of the immigrant stream by reducing the number of single male laborers and increasing the number of females (Ichihashi, 1932:70–1). This was the period when many male immigrants sought marriage partners and the practice of "picture brides" emerged, in which marital agreements were finalized through the exchange of pictures.

There were other things worth noting about this immigration pattern. First of all, the main immigration occurred in a very short period of time, the window of entry (for the male laborers) hardly lasting more than a decade. Secondly, the presence of women in this immigrant stream did not occur until after the reduction in the flow of male laborers. With one exception (1895), the yearly percentage of women immigrants was less than 10% up to 1905. This percentage then increased to 17% in 1905. Between 1911 and 1920, women constituted over 39% of the immigrants. While Japanese women constituted only 4% of the Japanese population in the United States in 1900, they increased to 12% in 1910 and were 34% of the population in 1920 (Ichihashi, 1932:71).

The general immigration pattern of the Japanese Americans therefore consisted of an initial incoming burst of young single males, who then began to marry in a brief period of time; this was followed by a concentrated period of childbearing. This lead to a distorted age and sex structure of the population in which there was no smooth age gradation in numbers from a broad base of newborns at the bottom to a small band of elders at the top. Rather, it was a structure consisting of two clusters of people: one concentrated in the middle of the age structure and their offspring at the very bottom. This distorted age/sex pyramid as seen in 1920 is shown in Figure 1. A typical age/sex structure not affected by migration usually takes the shape of a pyramid with a broad base at the bottom and declining numbers as one goes up the age structure. One can see in Figure 1 that the older cluster represents the immigrants and the other represents their offspring. More importantly, there are relatively few people in between, nor are there significant numbers above the older cluster. What you see emerging in 1920 is the demographic outline of Japanese-American society; a society organized around two generational clusters, each cluster very homogeneous with respect to age. This was the framework for the formation of a very cohesive group.

FIGURE 1
Age and Sex Distribution of the Japanese-American Population, 1920 and 1940 *



* Compiled from U.S. Bureau of the Census 1920, 1940.

In 1920, it was estimated that the crude birth rate among Japanese Americans was 68 per 1000 (Peterson, 1971:199). To those not familiar

with demographic numbers, such a birth rate is extremely high—much higher than any country in the world. Indeed, if we assume that the death rate among this youthful population is relatively low (which is a safe assumption), such high births combined with relatively low deaths meant that the Japanese population in this country could double in less than 20 years just through natural increase (births over deaths, no immigration). This is what led to a cry of alarm among nativists, especially in California, about the impending "Yellow Peril." The "Japs are breeding like rabbits" became the racist cry and these people were afraid the Japanese would soon overrun the Pacific Coast.

One can see from Figure 1 the reason for this high birth rate: most of the adult population consisted of couples having children. It was not the result of married couples averaging large numbers of children (like rabbits), but only that many couples were having their babies at the same time. When these couples completed their families in 1940, their birth rates subsided dramatically. The crude birth rate in 1940 was down to 15 per 1000 population, which was similar to the national level.

Until 1924, immigrants were still coming to the U.S. through various loopholes in the existing immigration laws. But the strong hostility toward the Japanese finally led to an even stricter ban on immigration. In 1924, a new law, similar to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, was passed. It prohibited any further immigration from Japan, and, moreover, it prevented those immigrants already in the United States from ever becoming its citizens (Hosokawa, 1969:99–113).

The 1924 Exclusion Act was the final death blow to Japanese immigration, a result of a series of legal measures directed at the Japanese. Even before then there were various acts aimed directly against the Japanese. The State of California passed an anti-alien land law prohibiting the Japanese immigrants from owning farmland. There was even an attempt by the San Francisco School Board to send the children of the immigrants to segregated schools (Kitano, 1976:29). Labor unions barred these immigrants from membership (Peterson, 1971:30–5). Thus, with the Exclusion Act of 1924, the two major immigrant streams from East Asia were closed, not to be opened again until World War II (for the Chinese) and until 1952 (for the Japanese). From 1924 to World War II there were more Japanese leaving the United States than entering, and those who entered were primarily temporary aliens arriving for business and governmental reasons.

Thus, starting with a population of 55 in 1870, the Japanese population in the United States increased to 126,947 in 1940, or less than 1% of the total United States population (see Table 2). A great majority of the

Japanese Americans resided on the Pacific coast, especially in the state of California, with the remaining in Washington and Oregon.

TABLE 2

Japanese-American Population, 1870–1940*

Year	Total Japanese in the U. S.	Total U. S. Population	Percentage of Japanese
1870	5	38,558,371	0.000014
1880	148	50,155,783	0.003
1890	2,039	62,947,714	0.003
1900	24,326	75,994,575	0.03
1910	72,157	91,971,266	0.08
1920	111,010	105,710,620	0.10
1930	138,834	122,775,046	0.11
1940	126,947	131,669,275	0.09

* Hosokawa, 1969: 98.

The Japanese-American Community

As we noted, the Japanese-American population was composed of a two-generation layer. Each layer was very distinctive in terms of age, language, values, and behavior patterns. The first and dominant layer was that of the first-generation immigrant settlers called the Isseis and the second layer consisted of their second-generation offspring called the Niseis. The community organization was formed along these two generational layers (Peterson, 1971:201–7).

Japanese-American culture developed from the values and practices brought by the Isseis from their homeland. Since most of them were born and raised during the Meiji Period in Japan, these values reflected that period. Since Japanese immigration abruptly stopped after 1924, no new sets of Japanese values were being injected into the ethnic subculture. In short, the original set of values—Meiji in nature—was not exposed to any competing sets of Japanese values. Instead, this set of values was destined to be tempered and revised with novel innovations in the process of adapting to American society, and the generation of Japanese Americans that followed these immigrants were socialized with these values.

The values placed great emphasis on family ties, hard work, deferred gratification, and discipline, with a great emphasis on entrepreneurship. Indeed, these values are remarkably consistent with those of middle-class

America of that time. Success through small business ventures was considered quite important. The value system also placed great emphasis on education—a Japanese cultural characteristic that received special emphasis during the Meiji period. Thus, in the Japanese-American community, a high degree of status and prestige was bestowed on those youngsters who performed well in schools (and their families). Families competed for these types of recognition. Sociologist Frank Miyamoto describes very vividly the high degree to which the Japanese community in Seattle organized and supported its local elementary schools in order to insure that their children would be adequately educated (Miyamoto, 1939). This is even more interesting in light of the fact that these schools were very segregated (de facto) and could be described, using present-day terminology, as ghetto schools. Yet they maintained high levels of student achievement and produced large numbers of youngsters who went on to become high school honor students and college graduates.

The Isseis brought from their Japanese homeland an amazing capacity to organize and adapt. A number of social observers of Japanese culture have noted their practice of putting the group before the individual. Contrary to American values, which placed great emphasis on individuals, the Japanese focussed more on the welfare of the group. Moreover, this had a relativistic pragmatic view in which specific beliefs and practices could be altered so long as such change strengthened the survival of the group (O'Brien and Fugita, 1991:3–6). With this emphasis comes a flexibility, especially when one is attempting to adapt to a new culture.

So, with a homogeneous demographic age structure along with a set of cultural practices that encouraged group viability, the Japanese in America were able to develop a cohesive community structure with surprising flexibility and strength. In the long run it was a platform that saw them through some very difficult times and then made success possible when the right opportunity became available.

The capacity to organize can be seen in a number of key groups and institutions the Isseis developed. Two very powerful groups emerged to fulfill certain social and economic needs. One was the *kenjinkai*, an association of those who originated from the same prefecture (*ken*) in Japan (Kitano, 1976:66). These groups performed a wide variety of functions in the community. They helped those who were undergoing hardships; they assisted others in finding suitable marriage partners; they were the main social outlets for immigrants from the same areas of Japan to picnic together, participate in variety shows, and take part in plays; they offered welcome relief to the Isseis from the pressures of immigrant existence.

More special was the *tanomoshi*, an association that was specifically

formed to supply funds to those seeking to start a business. The members of these groups pooled their funds to make it possible to grant a loan to a member to start some small business. The Chinese and Koreans also developed similar types of organizations (O'Brien and Fugita, 1991:27–8).

Occupationally, the Japanese with their farm background and entrepreneurial aspirations were led into two major occupational areas. A substantial proportion of Japanese Americans became farmers, an activity that had mixed blessings because it put them in direct competition with the dominant white farmers, arousing the anger of the latter. The Japanese became skilled truck farmers able to cultivate lands considered by the whites to be uncultivatable. Moreover, not only were they able to farm successfully, but their penchant for entrepreneurship also drove them to own and farm their own land and even attempt to control the retailing of their products. Agriculture was to become one of the major focal points of antagonism against Japanese Americans (Kitano, 1976:17–20).

In urban areas, the Japanese, with their fervor for entrepreneurship, engaged in a variety of small businesses. They became shopkeepers, farm-produce distributors, cheap-hotel operators, and gardeners; they provided services not only for their own group but also for the wider society. Some observers saw them as playing the American version of the middleman-minority role (Bonacich, 1973). The middleman-minority role is a common role historically played by various racial and ethnic groups. Examples of such groups are the Jews in Europe, the Chinese in Southeast Asia, the Asian Indians in East Africa, the Arabs in West Africa, and the Armenians in Turkey (Gill et al. 1992:334). As the term "middle" connotes, these types of minorities acted as social buffers—they were positioned between the indigenous elite strata and the populace. Quite often they faced considerable hostility from both. In certain activities, the Japanese did position themselves functionally (along with the Chinese) between the producer-owner class and the working class. They distributed the farm products of the major producers to the populace, and as shopkeepers they provided services, sold foods and other goods of the wider society to those at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. These are best seen in the "mom and pop" grocery stores and cleaning shops.

Up until World War II the Japanese-American community was dominated and controlled by the Isseis. They spoke Japanese and behaved like Japanese. The Niseis spoke mostly English and they saw themselves as American. As the second generation, Niseis were put in a marginal role, a position quite often found among descendants of immigrants, who are in a transitional position and must cope with two cultures: those of their

immediate ancestors and those of the host society. This marginal role was extremely difficult for Niseis, since the two cultures in this case were so distinct and different.

There was a third category of Japanese Americans called the Kibeis. The Kibeis were Niseis educated in Japan who returned to the U.S. They spoke Japanese and displayed other Japanese habits quite different from the Niseis. Because of these differences, they tended to be ostracized by the Niseis and formed their own social groups (Kitano, 1976:159–60).

As we noted before, the demographic structure tended to intensify the homogeneity of each grouping and the differences between them. The Niseis were very distinct from those of the Isseis. The age gap between them was relatively wide, and there was a pronounced language difference. But on the other hand the Niseis were very similar to each other agewise. Most of the Niseis were within a spread of 20 years. Moreover, there were no significant groupings outside of these three—you were either Issei, Nisei, or Kibei.

These generational labels were not just constructs of social observers. They were to become an important basis by which Japanese Americans identified with each other. There were strong feelings of attachment, a sense of commonality, between those in each generational group. When Japanese-American strangers met, one of the first steps of interaction was to determine which generation they belonged to. Knowing whether one was Issei, Nisei, or Kibei, guided the level and quality of interaction between strangers. Japanese Americans were perhaps the only immigrant group that was so strongly differentiated internally by generation.

This homogeneity also meant there was a heavy emphasis on conformity. Great demands were made with respect to dress codes, sexual behavior, and other social manners. Also, great importance was put upon excelling in school and athletics. Some social psychologists saw these unusually strong pressures put on Niseis as hindering their social development in later life. These heavy demands to conform to a tightly knit group led to passiveness, self-effacement, and low self-esteem.

WORLD WAR II

By 1940, the Nisei segment of the Japanese-American population had been completed and even a third generation (referred to as Sansei) was discernible. On the eve of World War II, most of the Niseis were either teenagers or young adults. A substantial number had completed high school and were beginning college. Also, the Isseis had pretty much abandoned their sojourner views and were resigned to remaining in America.

The outbreak of war between the United States and Japan unleashed a series of governmental actions against Japanese Americans. In an unprecedented move, the United States government, for alleged reasons of national security, removed 110,000 of them from the west coast and detained them in internment camps. Two-thirds of those evacuated and interned were American citizens, in effect imprisoned without trial. There were 10 of these camps located in the Pacific and Rocky Mountain states. Most of them held 8,000 to 10,000 people, though the largest contained close to 20,000. The residents in these camps were housed in military-like structures: wooden barracks with tar-papered walls.[2] Each camp consisted of a series of blocks, and each block in turn consisted of a dozen or so barracks. The barracks were subdivided into rooms, each room housing one family. Each block had bathroom and laundry facilities and a mess hall where the daily meals were served. For many, confinement in these camps lasted until the end of World War II, a period of over three and one-half years. After the first year of confinement, a concerted effort was made to relocate the Japanese Americans (especially college students) to areas on the east coast.

The pain, suffering, and humiliation of the removal process, the squalor, dreariness, and boredom of camp life have been vividly described and documented in numerous studies and novels.[3] Recent generations of Japanese Americans and others have wondered how this was allowed to happen. In the present atmosphere of open civil rights protests, confrontations, and heavy emphasis on individual rights, how was the incarceration of the Japanese Americans ever possible? Of course, a handful of individuals did resist. But most Japanese Americans accepted this type of treatment, in the sense that they went along with it in an orderly and cooperative fashion. There were several key reasons why they did so.

On the eve of World War II the Japanese Americans were not in any way a political force. Most of the Niseis were either too young to vote or indifferent, and the Isseis had not been allowed to be citizens. Moreover, Japanese Americans were relatively small in numbers. In contrast, Hawaii, where the Japanese Americans constituted a large segment of the population (one-third of the island population), they did have greater political leverage and no evacuation occurred.

Thus, being small in numbers and not politically active, the Japanese wielded little political clout. When these factors were combined with the anti-Japanese agitations of the times further exacerbated by the wartime hysteria, effective resistance was not possible. To top things off, there were very few outside groups defending the Japanese Americans. Support for the evacuation and internment was overwhelming—just about everyone

wanted to put the Japanese away. Civic, business, and religious groups went on record for removal. These were not the usual hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan but respected ones like chambers of commerce, the Kiwanis, and the Rotary Club. When Congress discussed the decision to intern, *not one congressional member expressed any strong opposition to the move.* Several congressmen wondered whether removal was necessary but finally went along with the decision.[4]

The internment occurred just as leadership in the Japanese-American communities was being passed from the aging Isseis to the Niseis. With their ascendancy the Niseis had to come to grips with their own identity, not only psychologically but legally. Who were they? Japanese? Americans? These were formal questions asked by the government, and how one responded determined how one was to be treated.

The camp experience, with its prison-like environment, further homogenized the Japanese-American group. The war came just as social distinctions—poor to rich, blue collar to white collar—were beginning to form. In internment camps, just as in other prisons, a type of primitive equality prevails: inmates are equally treated in a degrading manner. Each person is allotted the same quantity and quality of food, each receives the same number of sausages for dinner. The top pay in the camps for professionals like doctors or teachers was $19, while an unskilled laborer received $16. Perhaps this experience later discouraged and slowed the pace of social differentiations that inevitably resulted as this group joined the American mainstream.

AFTER WORLD WAR II

With the ending of the war there were substantial numbers of Japanese Americans living in the midwest and eastern regions of the United States. Eventually most began returning to the west coast to pick up their shattered lives. The initial reaction to their return was again one of hostility and violence. But by the 1950s hostilities towards the Japanese were noticeably subsiding. The 1950s were good years for the advancement of opportunities for the Niseis.

Nisei sociologist Harry Kitano, writing on the whole Japanese-American experience, described it as the wrong group going to the wrong country, wrong state at the wrong time (Kitano, 1976:15). Given the prewar and wartime experience, Professor Kitano was correct. Certainly, nothing went right for this group. Yet the Nisei experience in the 1950s significantly reversed these misfortunes. Indeed, one can argue that the Niseis were born at the right time because they came of age at a very opportune time.

America in the 1950s embarked upon an incredible period of economic growth and prosperity. Opportunities for the Niseis became available; more importantly, they were educationally prepared to take immediate advantage of these opportunities. The tremendous investment in education suddenly and almost miraculously began to have its payoffs. No longer was the college-educated Nisei forced to work in his parents' grocery store or vegetable stand because other jobs were not available. Opportunities opened rapidly in a most unprecedented manner, fueled by the expanding economy and a changing world political situation. Japan was no longer an enemy nation. One can only wonder how it might have turned out under other circumstances—a prolonged recession, for example.

When the author (a Nisei) first enrolled in college in 1948 and made known his desire to be a teacher, the university strongly discouraged him from pursuing this goal, on the grounds that it would have been impossible to find a teaching job. In Seattle, where this author went to school, Nisei students majoring in engineering were forced to accept jobs outside of the state, even though one of the industrial giants of the Pacific Northwest, Boeing Aircraft, was located there with a large staff of engineers. But by the time of the author's graduation in 1952, the field of education was wide open for Niseis: teaching jobs were plentiful and there were specific requests for Nisei teachers! The situation had changed for engineering graduates as well: Boeing was hiring Niseis in great numbers and into responsible professional positions. Other job openings were becoming available in areas that were previously undreamed of by Niseis.

Census data from the 1960s began to show the remarkable socio-economic advancement of Japanese Americans. Since then, recent data (see Tables 3, 4, and 5) show that they have attained an average income level higher than that of the whites (Table 3), they have one of the highest percentages of workers in professional and managerial positions (Table 4), and their educational level is higher than most other racial and ethnic groups (Table 5).[5]

TABLE 3

Income for Selected Racial and Ethnic Groups, 1989*

	United States	Chinese	Japanese
Median Household Income (dollars)	35,056	36,259	41,626
Median Family Income (dollars)	35,225	41,316	51,550
Per Capita Income (dollars)	14,143	14,876	19,373

TABLE 4

Occupational Distribution for Selected Racial and Ethnic Groups, 1990*

Occupation	United States	Chinese	Japanese
Managerial and Professional	26.4%	35.6%	37.0%
Farming, Forestry, and Fishing	2.5%	.4%	2.7%
Precision Production, Craft and Repair	11.3%	5.6%	7.8%
Operators, Fabricators, and Laborer	14.9%	10.6%	6.9%

TABLE 5

Educational Attainment for Those 25 Years and Over for Selected Racial and Ethnic Groups, 1990*

	White		Chinese		Japanese	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
High School or Higher	79.9%	66.7%	73.6%	70.2%	87.5%	85.6%
Bachelor's or Higher	25.4%	19.3%	40.7%	35.0%	34.5%	28.2%

* Compiled from Table 3 of the U. S. Bureau of the Census (1993:6).

Despite their relatively small numbers, Japanese Americans have become major players on the national scene, they have members in Congress and the United States Senate. Just recently, they skillfully organized themselves to pass legislation that compensated every Japanese American incarcerated during World War II. Each was awarded $20,000 by the United States government for spending time behind barbed wires.

By all measures, you might describe them now as a successful minority. Indeed, they are sometimes referred to as the "model minority," a term that makes them very uncomfortable. Their accomplishments have at times been contrasted to those of the African or Hispanic American. The not-so-subtle message of these comparisons is that everyone should try to emulate the Japanese Americans.

Another indicator of their integration into the broader society has been the increase in the number of intermarriages between Japanese Americans and whites. The incidence of marriages outside the group range as high as 60% in certain parts of California (Kitano et al., 1984). Intermarriage has been seen by a number of sociologists as the final stage

of successful integration. Marriage is the final obstacle to be overcome for a minority group to become assimilated into a majority group.

Where They Are Going

American society is a mosaic of various racial and ethnic groups. Some groups have successfully integrated into this pattern, while others are still struggling to do so. Some, especially those from northern and western Europe, have assimilated completely. They have become part of the mainstream of American life, have intermarried with one another, and have pretty much lost any vestiges of their ethnic past. They see themselves as people of Scotch-Irish, or German-Dutch descent, but these ethnic terms have very little meaning for them. Others have also succeeded in joining the mainstream but are making conscious efforts at retaining their ethnic ties. Perhaps the best example of this mode have been the Jews. Most immigrant groups are mixtures of both assimilated elements and those retaining their ethnicity (e.g., Irish, Italians, East Europeans).

Our analyses have shown that the Japanese Americans have moved into the American mainstream. They have achieved a high level of structural assimilation: for one thing, they have gained large-scale entrance into the major institutions of the host society. For another, as mentioned before, they are beginning to intermarry in significant numbers with the dominant white society. This level of assimilation is unprecedented; no other nonwhite immigrant group, with the possible exception of the Chinese Americans, has attained this level of acceptance.

The Japanese Americans seem to be at a crossroads: the intermarriage rates indicate they are moving along a path toward complete assimilation, racially and perhaps ethnically. One sociologist (Montero) sees this process of social mobility and intermarriage as "ethnic suicide."

While the evidence for complete assimilation seems impressive, there is also evidence that significant numbers of Japanese Americans still insist on maintaining their ethnic ties. Vestiges of their Japanese past remain to give central importance to the group. Japanese Americans are still strongly group oriented, and they are active in forming and maintaining Japanese-American voluntary associations for a variety of reasons (O'Brien and Fugita, 1991:125–6). They do so even in areas where very few of them reside. In short, being with one's kind is still important to them.

Japanese Americans are also not naive enough to believe that all discrimination against them has disappeared. They are aware of the existence of such things as the "glass ceiling," a subtle barrier of racism at

work that prevents them from moving up into the top levels of management. Consequently, being organized to protect their interests is also important to them.

Finally, there is the international factor. The painful experience of World War II always reminds Japanese Americans that some of their fellow Americans and even non-Americans still perceive them as being Japanese (Hosokawa,1982). So, with every twist and turn in international events, especially involving the economic rivalry between Japan and the United States, they see themselves as vulnerable to becoming victims of any hostilities emerging from this rivalry.

American society at the end of the twentieth century is undergoing a serious crisis. While able to maintain its world position economically and militarily, it is undergoing some painful internal dissensions. The great American experience, much admired and envied by the rest of the world, was based on its diversity and quest for freedom. But these elements are now becoming the cause of its internal conflicts. It is a society being torn apart by its diversity. Most of its major problem areas (e.g. crime, violence, poverty) can be traced to its inability to solve these problems of racial and ethnic diversity. In the attempts to find some solutions, immigration is one of the areas undergoing serious scrutiny. Once seen as the source of America's strength, it is now being seen as a source of its problems. How immigration will be regarded will partially depend on how well the various immigrant groups can manage to adapt.

There is therefore a lesson to be learned by studying how the Japanese Americans adapted. How were they successful? The most obvious and simple answer was through education; it was their major avenue for moving up the socio-economic ladder. But as the experience of the past few years sadly shows, getting educated is an extremely complex procedure. For members of racial and ethnic minorities it goes well beyond individual efforts. It not only requires a high level of individual discipline and commitment but also needs dedicated and organized support from families and communities.

The Japanese were able to succeed because they saw the importance of education for their young and were able to give firm support to education through strong family and community ties. Other immigrant groups that can organize themselves along these lines may probably have similar experiences. Given the present level of global involvement, education is the main strategic weapon that immmigrant groups must use to survive and succeed.

In looking back at the last 100 years of the Japanese immigration experience, one is still impressed by the legacy of the original Isseis, by what

they passed on to the Niseis; initially questioned and challenged, they were the springboard from which a succeeding generation was able to raise itself from total despair to an impressive level of success. They (the Isseis) are gone now, and the Niseis have moved on to take their place as part of America's corps of senior citizens.

But what is the legacy of the Niseis? If the Isseis left a body of values and practices, what have the Niseis bequeathed to the following generations? Oddly enough, the most significant thing the Niseis are passing on is not a core of values but an experience. It is an experience that began with playing the marginal role of juggling two cultures. It went on to become more traumatic, the wartime experience of humiliation, of imprisonment. No other event has so dominated the life history of the Niseis as this experience. But it was also an experience of overcoming this difficult situation through strength and tenacity. Perhaps what might be learned from all this is that pursuing the American Dream is not an exercise in futility—even if the ones pursuing that dream are nonwhite immigrants and their descendants.

NOTES

[1] This phrase is adapted from Takaki's book, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Takaki, 1989).

[2] For pictorial illustrations of the camps, see J. Armor and Peter Wright, 1988. The book contains photographs of this camp by noted photographer Ansel Adams.

[3] For examples see Houston, 1973; Uchida, 1985; Okada, 1976; Okubo, 1983.

[4] For descriptions of these events, see McWilliams, 1945 and TenBroek et al., 1970.

[5] While some of the other Asian groups (e.g. Chinese in Table 5) show higher levels of education, this can be attributed to the newer immigration of professionals and other educated people in these groups.

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